



07/03/19

Dear Members of the Alaska Senate and House of Legislators,

The Family Physicians of the Alaska urge you to override the line item vetoes that Governor Dunleavy has instituted. We feel that these cuts will cause irreparable harm to Alaska's medical education system and adversely affect the most vulnerable in our state. The consequences will last for decades.

Although we are gratified that funding for WWAMI and the education of Alaskan physicians was spared, we are concerned about how the cuts will adversely affect the 1st year of WWAMI which is through the University of Alaska system. Family medicine and Primary care are already facing physician shortages in Alaska and we feel this will exacerbate the problem.

We are also concerned about our current nursing shortage. Alaska has a shortage of nurses, especially nurses that can handle the rigors and broad knowledge base of rural health care. The cuts to the Alaska education system will likely mean cutting the nursing program. The best nurses we have are ones that are locally educated and trained, especially those in rural communities.

Reducing the health care workforce in Alaska will lead to worse outcomes. This will likely be exacerbated by the cuts to Medicaid. A 10% cut of total Medicaid dollars will result in an actual Medicaid cut of 20% as we have a 1:1 match with Federal Medicaid dollars. Those reductions will negatively impact the health care safety net for our state; potentially causing clinic and rural hospital closures, many of which are operating on extremely thin margins.

Further, cuts to Medicaid dental care, homeless assistance, and special needs will exacerbate the problem as high cost uncompensated emergency room care will replace low cost preventive medicine care. This is the most expensive way to deliver health care that must be provided one way or another and adversely affects hospital and clinic budgets.

National data is clear about what happens with the combination of workforce shortages, lack of access, and loss of rural hospitals. There is an increase in maternal and infant mortality. Mothers and babies die. This is not hyperbole, but reality; a grim marker for the health of the state as a whole.

We as Family Physicians of Alaska, urge you to override Governor Dunleavy's vetoes.

Amy Bukac, MD
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